

The Logistics of Waging War, Volume 2

US Military Logistics, 1982-1993

The End of “Brute Force” Logistics

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The primary function of an armed force is to fight in battle. That is nowadays impossible without a highly complex system of supporting activities. Among these a man may find not only the chance of self-fulfillment in a closely coherent group of human beings, where confidence is generally high and everyone receives from others what he is prepared to give. He will also be offered an opportunity for pretty nearly every pursuit that appeals to the rational man.

The Profession of Arms
Lieutenant General Sir John Winthrop Hackett

Preface

From 1982 to 1993 United States military logisticians were challenged by involvement in conflicts centering on Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf. During this period, the geopolitical structure of the world changed markedly. There is little resemblance between the world order that existed at the beginning of the decade of the 1980s and that which inaugurated the 1990s. Such drastic changes not only make it imperative that we seek to understand the military's rapidly changing role in the face of such monumental shifts in global perspective, but that the practitioners of the logistics art seek to understand the lessons of the past.

Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, and the media attention that accompanied them, introduced the US populace in general to the notion of logistics and its importance in modern military conflict. The commander of Operation DESERT STORM, General Norman Schwarzkopf, touted the role of logistics in the success of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Thus, logistics became prominent in the media, and part of the public perception of the war.

Logistics played a major role in planning and executing the allied forces war strategy. However the importance of logistics extended beyond the warfighting period. When combat ended, many assumed that once the troops came home, the logistics effort, like the war itself, had ended. Of course, this was far from the case. Not only were the allies faced with the need for a substantial retrograde operation to remove equipment from the theater and return it to home base locations, but also a substantial reconstitution effort to return equipment and supply stockpiles to necessary readiness levels. The significance of this logistics effort, known as Operation DESERT FAREWELL, is frequently overlooked.

Logistics professionals can ill-afford to squander the lessons learned from involvement in Operation DESERT STORM. The conflict severely tasked the majority of US military assets. Until these assets were fully reconstituted, US readiness for future conflicts was degraded. The myopic perspective regarding the extent of the Gulf War logistics effort cannot be allowed to take hold and survive in the heart of the community that can most benefit from the experience—the US military itself.

Every attempt must be made to ensure that the logistics community develops a vital understanding of the requirements and critical dimensions of logistics operations. The condition of US warfighting and sustainment assets following Operation DESERT STORM directly affects US military readiness for involvement in future conflicts. The importance and difficulties of both combat logistics and retrograde/reconstitution activities should be of substantial interest to US military planners and logisticians.

. . . [DESERT STORM] presages very much the type of conflict we are most likely to confront again in this new era—major regional contingencies against foes well-armed with advanced conventional and nonconventional weaponry . . . We must configure our policies and forces to effectively deter, or quickly defeat, such future threats.

Defense 91, Apr 91
Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney

To the extent that Operation DESERT STORM serves as the model for future US military actions, the need to fully understand the depth of logistics involvement in the Gulf War is critical. Maintaining combat capability in the face of a significantly reduced availability of resources is a daunting challenge. Success in this challenge is vital to the maintenance of the United States' position as the only remaining superpower.

Introduction

Any amateur can shove tanks, planes, and infantry around the map; the real business of war is getting gas, ammunition and spare parts to the people that need them, where they need them . . . the tail, in the form of logistics will more and more wag the dog . . . logistics will increasingly become the single greatest impediment to have real combat capability.

Air Force Magazine, Dec 83
Edgar Ulsamer

The above quote emphasizes the critical nature of effective logistics to the future employment of military power. Only by studying the lessons of previous military engagements can we improve logistics planning and execution. This document chronicles military logistics efforts from 1982-1993 and serves as a continuation of *The Logistics of Waging War: American Military Logistics, 1774-1985, Emphasizing the Development of Airpower*, published in 1986.

The first volume presented characteristics of logistics support as the American military grew from militia to worldwide power projection force. The text concludes with a brief commentary on the Falkland Islands War (1982) between Great Britain and Argentina and a forward look at the future of logistics as the United States prepares for operations in the twenty-first century (1:192).

The scope and nature of military operations conducted during this period, and the unparalleled changes wrought by the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, were influential in the evolution of logistics doctrine and practice.

These developments necessitated the publication of this volume to reflect more recent military operations, changes in world affairs, and corresponding changes in the US military as they impact the application of military logistics.